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Patty Berg



www.assembly.ca.gov/berg

Dear Friends,

The deadline to introduce bills for 2005 has come and gone, and I want to tell you that I'm very pleased with the legislative package I'm authoring this year.

With the ongoing budget crisis, I've been careful to write only bills that can be adopted without adding a burden to the state's already stretched finances.

When money is tight you have to be very creative in finding ways to serve your district. I think we have been. I have a bill, for example, that would free up some existing money to help rural school districts replace some of the oldest, dirtiest, most dangerous school buses. I'll tell you more about it later in the newsletter.

On the budget front, meanwhile, there's been some welcome news. Revenues have gone up about \$2 billion more than anticipated. But we're a long way from being out of the woods, and we're going to have to watch every penny for years to come.

Getting a good, fair, responsible budget continues to be Job Number One. Budget subcommittees have begun their deliberations on the governor's spending plan, and are looking at it section by section. Crafting a budget is a difficult process, but so much is at stake for so many people that it simply can't be dashed out in haste.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Berg".

Assemblywoman, 1st District

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AB 1107 Makes the Ride to School Safer and Cleaner

There's no reason that kids in rural areas should be forever stuck in polluting old rigs, when safer, cleaner more efficient buses are available.

So, earlier this month I introduced a bill that will help rural school districts replace their pre-1987 buses without raising taxes or reducing other services.

Assembly Bill 1107 follows the model of bills I introduced last session that redirect existing resources to solve problems despite the state's ongoing budget shortfall.

Last year, I used the same stretch-a-dollar technique to help improve telephone service to some of our most remote communities, and to bring state-of-the-art computers to rural schools.

AB 1107, which I called the Safe Ride to School Act, uses an existing pool of money earmarked to replace pre-1977

buses. Since most of those older rigs are already off the road, this bill would tap into the existing \$4.5 million fund to replace pre-1987 buses.

There are currently about 6,000 pre-1987 buses in operation in California. Many of them are used in rural districts, where children are most likely to be dependent on buses to get to school.

Newer buses are not only safer, cleaner and more efficient, they're cheaper to maintain, requiring fewer repairs. A typical new school bus costs \$100,000 or more.

Rural school leaders say this bill could help them. Under the old program focused on pre-1977 buses, we managed to replace 110 old buses.

It's a wise investment, and it doesn't add a penny in cost that isn't already there.

Almost four out of 10 school buses on California roads today were manufactured before 1987. These older buses use more fuel, emit more pollutants and require more repairs than new buses.

Care-giver Tax Credit: The Right Thing to Do

For the past five years, the state has provided a \$500 tax credit to people who care for the needs of their aging or ailing family members.

It's a small way to help out these people who save the state countless millions of dollars each year by tending to the needs of family members who would otherwise require institutionalized care.

The credit was first enacted five years ago, and it's set to expire this year.

I think it would be a shame to let it go. It's really pennies on the dollar when you think about how much we save, and how much these wonderful people sacrifice.

That's why I've introduced Assembly Bill 298, which, if it becomes law, will extend the credit until 2011.

These people do their families and this state a great service. They take care of an adult or child who needs substantial assistance to get through a day, often requiring help with bathing, eating and getting dressed.

Many caregivers are parents, spouses or adult children. The Caregivers Credit

serves to either offset a tax debt, or to increase a tax refund. The tax credit helps alleviate the financial strain of care-giving, while at the same time sending a message that the care family members provide is a valuable service.

A lot of these hardworking families are struggling with a heavy burden. Extending the tax credit is a small, but meaningful way to help them.

There are an estimated 2.9 million caregivers in California. In just a couple years, that number is expected to reach 4 million.

If California's family caregivers were paid the typical wage of a home health aide -- about \$8 an hour -- the cost of care-giving would be \$22.1 billion a year.

The typical caregiver is female, married, in her mid-forties, and a high school graduate.

The credit is listed, along with other credits provided by the state, on page 26 of the Personal Income Tax Booklet for 2004.

If an individual is using the 540 form, the credit can be claimed on Page 2, Step 6.

Making a Point on Needle Exchange Programs

Needle exchange programs save lives by preventing the spread of disease, particularly HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis-C.

Intravenous drug use endangers not only the users themselves, but also the people who are intimate with them. That makes it doubly important to do everything we can to prevent the spread of disease through the sharing of contaminated syringes.

That's why our county public health officers support my Assembly Bill 547, which makes it easier for counties and cities to operate these life-saving programs.

County health officers are the physicians we entrust with protecting us from a range of dangers. They alert us when water becomes contaminated, or when a contagion is unleashed. We rely on them to make plans for dealing with

threats like West Nile Virus.

We relied on them to help sort out the confusion over flu vaccine distribution earlier this year.

We should rely on their advice when it comes to the importance of needle-exchange programs.

You might be surprised to know that under existing law, a county or city must declare a public health emergency every two weeks in order to continue operating a needle-exchange program.

Health officers tell us this is a waste of time, and a nuisance that can keep some administrators from ever beginning a program.

Assembly Bill 547, which is very similar to my Assembly Bill 2871 from last year, would eliminate that two-week necessity, allowing health experts to operate a program just as long as it is needed.

More than 1,800 people die of AIDS in California each year, and another 1,500 people become infected through intravenous drug use.

Support is High For Compassionate Choices Act

As you probably know, I am working with Assemblyman Lloyd Levine to enact the California Compassionate Choices Act, which would allow terminally ill adults of sound mind to ask for and get life-ending medication.

While there are those who oppose this measure, I have been truly touched by the outpouring of support from people all over California.

Friends here in our district have called in support, as have people from San Diego and points in between.

It shouldn't be surprising. Because a recent statewide Field Poll found that 70 percent of Californians think that terminally ill patients should be able to do exactly what our bill allows.

The survey found that 77 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans supported the rights offered in the California Compassionate Choices Act (Assembly Bill 654.)

It also found 65 percent of Catholics, 63 percent of Protestants, and 83 percent of those belonging to "other religions" supported the idea. Among those with no religious preference,

support was 83 percent.

Most people will never use this right. But it's obvious that they want the comfort of knowing the option is there.

Specifically, AB 654 would give terminally ill, mentally capable adults with less than six months to live the right to end their own lives.

It's based on Oregon's Death With Dignity Act and it includes the same safeguards.

Two physicians must agree that the patient has less than six months to live.

Both physicians must verify that the patient is capable of making decisions about their own care.

Both physicians and the dispensing pharmacist must submit detailed reports to the Department of Health Services.

The patients must make two oral requests and a written request. There are "cooling off" periods, to ensure that no one makes the decision in haste.

The patient must self-administer. No one may assist the patient in taking the medication. The role of the physician is limited to the clerical function of writing the prescription.

A Visit With Sonoma State University Students



Last year, 16.5 million Californians were registered to vote. That's about 75 percent of the 22 million Californians who were eligible. To register on-line, click here to visit the [Secretary of State's website](#).

Sonoma State University students paid a visit to Patty Berg's Capitol office earlier this month and learned a little about the busy life of an elected official. She told these potential leaders of tomorrow about her daily duties and urged them all to register, and to vote in every election. It's a right and it's a duty.

Coffee Break

Spring Sensations

B C E L B C L E A N I N G T W
 Z L V Q I K N G P B S K U F K
 J K O H G I W G V P I O H L J
 J J W S H N R L P P R K G Z H
 A S B S S E I X G P B F B R H
 S R N L E O I R S A N E L H T
 C U L N Y Y M B P T R C Q E W
 S E V A E L M B U S M D O M O
 J F R E E F W L K I H I E P R
 R G L A O T I O P V G N R N G
 Z T K S U P E O Y N N U B U C
 U G F T S Q E M C A O R X T P
 B H E E B C O K N S A L N N K
 F K J R F L O W E R P P R O J
 N Q Y R H F N E L C D U L Y P

BLOOM
 BLOSSOM
 BUNNY
 CLEANING
 EASTER
 FLOWER
 GARDEN
 GREEN
 GROWTH
 LEAVES
 PURIM
 SPRING
 SPROUT
 SUNSHINE
 TULIPS

Words can be written diagonally, bottom to top or backwards.